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Princeton Theological Seminary. Society of Inquiry. Committee on Public Morals, Romish Church, and Infidelity.

Annual Report of the Committee
on
Public Morals Roman Church & Infidelity

Read before I Society of Inquiry at its Meeting
March 1854

Roman Church
By. J. H. Nixon

In the preparatn of the report on / Roman Ch. we have consulted the Metropolitan Catholic Almanac for 1854 and / Files ^ magazine ^ Amer. & Foreign Xtn union for 53 and to ls publications we wd at / outset refer the society for fuller informatn & on most ^ topics to wh. we shall allude. From / 1st ls authorities we learn l / Roman Church in / U.S. numbers at present 7 Archbishops 32 Bishops 1574 Priests, 1712 Churches & 746 stations, ate which are distributed among 41 dioceses & 2 vicariates, showg in / past year an increase of 9 diocs. 103 priests & 167 Churches,

The 7 Ecclesiastical are those of N.Y. Balt. Cincinnati St Louis N.O. San Francisco & Oregon. The ~~new~~ dioceses erected during / year are those of Brooklyn, Newark N.J. Burlington Vt Portland Me Quincy Ills Erie Pa, Covington Ky Nachitoches La Santa Fe in New Mexico & San Francisco

The no of ecc. Seminaries is 34 with 331 students — Colleges 20 Female Seminaries 112 & Parochial Schools whose name is Legion. It is evident from the number and position & size of / new dioceses that Rome has large expectations as to the future of this country. In order to bring out their profess'd views on this point we give quote an extract from an article in the Shepherd of the Valley the Catholic organ at St Louis, entitled the U.S. becoming Catholic. See Mag. for Nov. page 497.

The student of Ch. Hy as he reads this will be reminded as perhaps it was designed he should be of a passage in Tertullian in wh. the Father speaks the wonderful progress the early Church. This language of confident expectation has become well nigh stereotyped by our Roman friends — From the most Reverend Lord John down to the most servile son of Holy Mother we hear the same exulting strains of Catholic glorification with a deep and an ~~accompaniment in~~ under-tone accompaniment relative to Protestant decline & downfall. Much of this is founded on real conviction — but the leaders in the church ~~Ecclesia~~ we imagine give vent to these confident boastings anticipations from the double design of dispiriting their adversaries and of exciting in their own people that enthusiasm wh. is always the strongest under the anticipation of speedy success. And they do sometimes blow cold as well as hot, when they have a different purpose to serve they can make use of a different style — Hence a Roman priest returning to Ireland from ts country either with a view of preventing emigration or of stirring up the faithful there to greater effort in our behalf ~~of this country~~ has been known recently to speak of the "awful falling away" on the part of Catholics in this Country from the ancient Faith. More than 2 millns of Irishmen according to his assertion have been lost to the catholic church by our land. ~~in this country~~. & he argues thence quite affectingly as to the danger to wh Catholics are here exposed. Now although it matters little to us whether his reverence Father Mullen or the ~~tender~~ gentle shepherd at St Louis ~~has~~ is the least given to speak the truth yet we think it may be well to look at the question which lies between ~~them~~ and we shall in endeavor to ~~in this extent~~ make the ~~present a~~ few facts & notions we can present bearing upon the subject of the ~~probable~~ Spread of Romanism in the United States.

From a table in the Catholic Almanac we learn that in the year 1808 there were but 68 priests & 80 churches in this country. In 1834 the number of Priests had reached 316 In the year 1844 it was 617 and in the year 1854 we have 1574 showing an annual increase for the last 10 years of 17 per ct in the personal material force of the Church. It is believed that the Catholic population of the Country has increased by emigration & in a far greater ratio

This wd seem to be evinced by the fact that from 1830 to 52 the Number of priests exceeded that of churches though by a constantly lessening proportion but since that time this state of things has been reversed. Not having the statistics of emigration at hand we cannot verify by actual citation what we believe to be the fact in the case.

We propose 1st to compare the present state of Romanism & of the various Protestant denominations. From the census of 1850 we learn that the Methodist churches in the U.S. number 12500 with church accommodations for 4.200.000 people - more than the largest estimate of the Cath. population of the country. The Baptists can also count 9000 churches & can accommodate about 3 mills. of ~~worsh~~ people. The Presby churches are 4700 and will seat 2.000000 more. The Congregational Episcopal German & Dutch Reformed Lutheran comprise 5000 more churches & can seat more than 2 mills of worshipers. We have an aggregate of 31.000 churches with church accommodations for about 11 mills of people and when ~~Babies~~ children old infirm are left out of view this will form at least 3/4 of ~~not~~ 4. the Protestant population of the country. while the Romanist churches of the land in 1850 would contain x Now Let it be remembered ~~too~~ that some of the first converts to organized Methodism are yet living in our land – that the 2 son of the first Moderator of our Genl Assembly has but recently passed from earth and that too with but few gray hairs upon his ~~head~~ & that at

but 600.000 persons probably after a liberal discount for babies to which they are justly entitled not more than 2/5 of their church going population. Since the statistics were gathered in 1850 the Congregationalists & N.S. Presby.s have been making vigorous efforts in the church extension cause in the West and in this they will probably soon be followed by the Old School branch of our church. x But These comparisons furnish another encouraging ~~a strenuous~~ subject of thought. In spite of all the strenuous exertions of the Roman Cath Hierarchy & the sleepless vigilance of her priesthood a large proportion of profess.d Romanists must long be absent from her worship and out of the reach of her influence. Wherever they go they find Protestant churches. They serve in Prot families. They must necessarily hear much call.d in question wh. they have never dreamed of doubting and in ~~short~~ as the result of all this the statement of Father Mullen in respect to apostasies here before alluded to, may ~~with~~ be used to perhaps with some limitations ~~as to number~~ – Probably not less than 1 Mill of those who ~~when they~~ had they remained in ~~left~~ Ireland ~~were too~~ wd have remained under the influence of Romanism ~~members of the church~~ have here forever renounced the church of their Fathers,

the beginning of this century some large & flourishing denominations of evang Protest were known only by name among us –

very. Much of this loſs has resulted in additions to Protestant churches tho we fear that far the greater proportion has gone to swell the ranks of practical or even professed infidelity. An important fact to be remembered in connection with the apparent spread of Romanism is that it is, in spite of their positive assertions ~~altogether~~ almost entirely an external growth. We hear the most of every case of conversion ~~on the part of~~ among native born Americans. Such They are much fewer than their papers wd lead us to believe. The growth of the Rom church is far more one of accretion than of development. The growth of Protestant churches on the other hand has been ~~al~~ mostly internal, with the exception of the Lutheran German Reformed &c which of themselves present an interesting parallel to the spread of Romanism their nos & rate of increase being nearly the same. and If the Catholic church has increased here it has been at the expense of Europe especially Ireland. There is strong probability that the supply from this source will for the future be greatly lessened. Australia is diverting much emigration. The "New Reformation" in Ireland in some parts of the island

~~has almost changed the proportion &~~ has greatly reduced the Catholic majority in that country, so the Protestantism is likely to gain mostly as much as her rival from future emigration from that direction. The supply of priests in Ireland has been discovered since ~~from~~ the success of Protes. missions of late to be quite inadequate to the full oversight of the Catholic population - & the more they have to do at home - the less shall we be troubled here.

The next ~~point~~ to which we allude in this general survey of facts & influences is the prevalence of a spirit of independence among the profess'd adherents of the Rom. Church in this country. Catholics here soon catch the spirit of our institutions. The habit of independent thought among us cannot be entirely repress'd. Accordingly we see now and then ~~outbreaks of~~ manifestations of a strong disposition to think & act & speak for themselves. One evidence of this is to be found in the long continued resistance made by churches in Rochester & Buffalo to the provisions of Canon law. A church in Philada within a short time past has exhibited the same refractory spirit, Another item bearing on this point is the ~~p~~ undoubted participation of many Catholics in the Bedini riots, indicating that in ~~many~~ some cases there are stronger feelings in the ~~hearts of Catholics~~ than ~~their~~ devotion to the papal see. A merchant in N Yk being requested by his Irish servant to write a letter ~~fr~~ his friends at home was told among other things to say that here "no priests could domineer over them as they did in owld Irelande." This same spirit of wh. we are constantly meeting examples is ~~St~~ probably the moving cause the effort recently made by Archbishop Hughes to secure a Bill tending to vest vesting all the church property in the hands the hierarchy to the exclusn of local trustees. Probably the truth in the matter has been reached in the following Burlesque petition a copy of which was placed before each member of the N.Y. legislature, during the discussion of the Bill ~~Sept 425~~

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It will take many such Bills as & many such Johns to put entirely away from the Catholics of the country ~~church~~ the idea that some ~~a~~ few things can be managed among them without the intervention of episcopal authority.

~~So far as external indications can be relied on the progress of~~
Romanizing tendencies.
~~Tractarian movement in the Episcopal church has been~~

The past year has furnished a much smaller number of clerical perversions than several preceding years. The whole no. claimed by them we believe is but 13 and some of these are of very questionable character. Bishop Ives has been the most ~~remarkable~~ notable of the year. In respect to the Romanizing tendencies in the German Reformed church we can say nothing except that it is not said that ~~[illegible]~~ that church has furnished any noticeable examples of open apostasy. The Episcopal church we think presents a far firmer front at the present time than at any period since the commencement of the Tractarian movement. Good evidence on this point may be found in the fact that the Freeman's Journal has been unusually spiteful of late in its attacks upon that branch of Protestantism. Having plucked as much of the fruit as came in their way they seem wisely to have concluded that all which is inaccessible is sour. —

The past year has exhibited some most significant proofs of the existence in the popular mind of a deep seated hatred to the ~~Catholic~~ Roman church - The Berlin riots though originating among foreign refugees yet drew largely from this source. A case more in point is the excitement caused in U.S. in view the arrest by the Municipal authorities of a supposed street preacher who had been haranguing a multitude on popery. Any one familiar with large cities well knows that an anti popery mob can be gathered at any time on the shortest notice - and those familiar with the state of feeling in the country know well in what estimation the ~~Catholic~~ priest and nun are held there. To the masses of this land the Roman church will long be ~~held~~ as the mother of abominations. This feeling is now being rapidly increased by emigration from the Continent where of late ~~Catholicism~~ Romanism has been securing large measures of popular hatred by identifying herself more closely with the despotic governments of Europe. We allude to this not as in itself furnishing ground of security for it is itself only in view of ~~its~~ the fact that so long as this spirit exists among the masses the door is most effectually ~~closed~~ shut upon every thing like

in some aspects, ~~a matter of~~ a just ~~[illegible]~~ cause of apprehension papal aggression. The work the Roman church does in this country must be purely a defensive one so long as the popular mind is thus ~~effectually~~ closed against her clergy

~~One of the great questions~~ Perhaps the most important subject ~~Question~~ question connected with the future influence of Romanism in our country is the School Question. It will be remembered that a few years ago a great hue & cry was raised by Romanists against the sectarianism of our Public Schools. The Protestant Bible must be banished or Catholic children must be withdrawn – The Bible was banished in many cases & ~~now~~ what is more Catholic children were still withdrawn wherever by hook a crook a ~~Catholic~~ Church School could be sustained. A higher aim was then taken – the participation in the School fund for the benefit and support of exclusive Catholic Schools. On the 9th of Jany 1853 Bishop Hughes commenced the new Crusade against public Schools by a Sermon in St Xavier's church against what he styled the Godless system of education – He was followed by several lesser lights but their combined ~~efforts~~ rays only served to ~~render~~ make the darkness visible. In spite of the systematic and earnest efforts — the result doubtless of well matured plans the movement failed in every case except that of California where they have at last sat down in the quiet enjoyment of their quota of the public fund. Gold is plenty there. Several interesting discussions have marked the progress of this effort. those between Bishop O'Connor & Dr Jacker of Pittsburg and between Priest Kelly & Rev Mr McClure of Jersey City are easily procured & are well worthy of careful attention. Although ~~them~~ Rome has seemed in this instance to pluck at the unripe fruit, we may be sure that the effort will not be discontinued and the most untiring vigilance will be necessary to prevent its ultimate success. Probably we can go to no part of this country in wh. the agitation on this subject will not sooner or later be commenced or renewed and we shall do well to prepare to meet it. The educational schemes of the Roman church are after all her main reliance for the future establishment of her power. While our present systems of education continue in operation her chance of reaching the popular mind is very slight.

There is too little time for calg attention to the operations of Amer & For. Chr. Union during the past year. It is at work in Europe & upon this Continent from Canada to Patagonia — though its resources both as to men & funds are lamentably out of proportion to its ~~wide~~ sphere of action. It will surprise some to hear that in Canada during the last ~~40~~ 30 years While the ~~Prot.~~ Catholic pop. has doubled the Prot pop. has increased 7 fold so that from a small ~~handful~~ proportion of Protestants the number has so steadily increased as to leave the Catholics in the minority. The society above referred to employs several missionaries in Canada & they have labored with the most encouraging success. Catholic So Amer. too as we have recently heard from Dr Baird has been wonderfully thrown open to Protestant ~~Chr.~~ effort during the last year or two and presents a most hopeful & interesting field of missionary labor. In our own country this Society operates by means of Missionaries & Colporters These are employed in nearly all the younger cities ~~& large towns~~

I Union as Newark Chicago Rochester Buffalo Louisville &c These missionaries are chiefly of foreign birth & converts from ~~Popery~~ Romanism. ~~Several congs~~ They aim at I introduction I Sc. among Catholics & endeavor to lead them to an attendance upon Protestant worship. Several congregations have been formed during I year of Irish German French Catholics. We select at random a few ~~reports~~ quotations from reports Is missionaries as I will be I most effectual way of showing I nature I work & I success that attends it.

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It was our intention to take into I a/c I probable influence of certain developments within I Roman church wh. have been brought before our attention in the review I year. To these however we can now only allude – there has been in repeated instances during I past year I open avowal of a spirit of intolerance which would do credit to the palmiest days of the Inquisition. New ground has been taken on I ~~subject~~ matter of mixed marriages – a fruitful subject – a preference has been expressed for popular ignorance except when education can be controlled by the church – The multiplying of churches commemorative of the ~~[illegible]~~ miraculous conception of the immaculate Mary – the Sovereign Mother God as she was styled by the new Bishop of Brooklyn – and the revival on the continent of all sorts of wonderful miracles – which they have here been anticipated by the Spiritual rappings – all these may justly be classed among the signs of the times. That the whole attitude of Romanism at present indicates the old inflexible purpose of conquering & controlling the world we think is sufficiently plain. That this part of the world evinces as yet any determination to put its neck in the yoke we think does not yet fully appear. That a hard struggle is to be fought in our own land between the pure Gospel on the one hand and Infidelity ~~Catholicism~~ Romanism on the other is abundantly evident. That it becomes all who ~~hold~~ look to the Bible ~~to be~~ as their only spiritual teacher and to Jesus ~~to be~~ as their only Mediator, to cease their petty bickerings and rally with one heart in behalf of what they hold most dear, is something which Protestant Xtns have been too slow to learn. That our popular intelligence & popular freedom of inquiry are to furnish us with invincible safeguard against infidelity ~~on the one hand~~ & superstition ~~on the other~~ it is foolish to assert. Our only safeguard is an enlightened earnest holy Protestant Xtnty. We must not only have our people well taught but we must exhibit to them in a higher degree than ever before the influence of truth in elevating individual character & in diffusing blessings upon the needy & the perishing. When the disgraceful contentions of rival denominations shall have ceased when it shall be said more truthfully of our Protestant churches than it can now be – that the poor have the Gospel preached to them, when we shall have begun, ~~with~~ like Him who came to seek & save that which was lost, to explore go, with hearts of love & lips ~~words~~ & hands ~~& deeds~~ of kindness, ~~to~~ the highways & the hedges – the lanes & the alleys when our pulpits shall be filled with simple yet attractive preachers who shall speak the truth in love and use great plainness of speech, when the children of light shall learn somewhat of the wisdom of the children of this world and equal them in the energy & devotion with wh. they pursue the objects of their desire then shall the Protestant churches of our land begin to gather in the sheaves of that grand harvest which is already whitening before them. That the Protestantism of our Country has as yet been most deficient in her duty to those whom the Providence of G. has cast within the reach of her influence we suppose none will be deny – It becomes us then as Protestants to repent ~~search out the causes~~ of our past inefficiency and apathy and bestir ourselves to improve ~~use~~ with a new zeal and diligence ~~seek to do~~ those many opportunities we find of enlightening the ignorant and elevating the degraded of our country.